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SUBJECT: RUSSIA: XENOPHOBIA REMAINS SERIOUS PROBLEM

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E: 07 YEKATERINBURG 111
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G: 07 MOSCOW 4089
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Summary

1. (SBU) Xenophobia continues to be a problem in the Russian Federation. In the last year, the number of violent incidents against those who are not Russian or who do not look Russian did not increase as dramatically as it has in the past, but the small but steady increase reveals an intractable problem with which the country must come to grips. The number of perpetrators of hate-related crimes is increasing as skinheads and members of nationalist groups make their presence felt throughout Russia. The root causes of xenophobia are difficult to determine, but some experts point to longstanding social and economic problems that lead many to promote a message of "Russia for Russians." The government has sent mixed signals; on the one hand acknowledging the problem while on the other hand trumpeting messages of Russian greatness that may feed the phenomenon. Prosecution of hate crimes is challenging under Russian law, since it requires proof of motive. The result is that it is easier to prosecute these crimes as "hooliganism" than as hate-motivated crimes. End summary.

Xenophobic Violence in 2007

2. (SBU) It remains difficult to quantify the true extent of xenophobic violence. Experts believe that government statistics underreport the problem of hate-related crimes. At the same time, official statistics for "extremist" crimes are higher than those of human rights organizations due to the government's broad definition of extremism. The Interior Ministry reported 327 crimes related to extremism during January - November, 2007. Several NGOs, including the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights and the Sova Center, track hate crime statistics by looking at official statistics while also collecting anecdotal reports from the media, NGOs and other sources. As a result of differing data collection methods, the numbers can vary widely.

3. (U) The Moscow Bureau for Human Rights recently released its annual report on hate crimes. According to their report for 2007, the level of xenophobic violence has grown by one-third since 2006 and the number of deaths resulting from hate-motivated violence in 2007 increased by twenty percent. There were 230 incidents of xenophobic violence in 2007, including 74 deaths and 317 injuries. Moscow and the Moscow region accounted for 44 deaths and 107 people injured in hate-related violence in 2007.

4. (U) A recent report by the Sova Center showed numbers that were

little changed from 2006. According to the Center, in 2007, no less than 550 people were attacked, 68 fatally, for hate-related reasons.

Sova's report noted that these figures do not include "underreported attacks on homeless people and on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people." (In 2007, there were four murders of homeless people which the police suspected were perpetrated by neo-Nazis.) By comparison, there were 539 victims of hate crimes in 2006 including 54 deaths. In 2005, there were 461 victims and 47 deaths. Hate crime incidents have increased every year since the Sova Center began issuing annual reports in 2003. Moscow, St. Petersburg and Nizhniy Novgorod "remain the major centers of racist violence," the Center reported. Others in the human rights community also point to Ingushetia as one of the least tolerant regions of Russia with Kalmykia and Rostov-on-Don also making that list. The Sova Center's report does not include statistics for the North Caucasus.

15. (U) Recent incidents from NGO sources and the media include the following:

- In early December 2007, a Nigerian riding the metro in Moscow was approached by four skinheads, one of whom pulled out a knife and asked, "What are you doing in our country?" The man was rescued by several riders who removed him from the train before the skinheads could attack.

- On December 1, 2007, journalist and Tuva Government press secretary Sayana Mongush, was attacked by a group of skinheads on

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the St. Petersburg subway (Ref A). Since then, 11 individuals between the ages of 14 to 18 have been arrested on charges related to that attack and others, including the murder of a migrant worker from Uzbekistan.

- On December 11, 2007, a group of people armed with baseball bats and steel bars attacked construction workers from North Korea in a

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Moscow suburb. Of the 39 people attacked, 16 were injured and four were taken to the hospital with serious injuries. Because the attackers were from the Caucasus (themselves a minority), law enforcement officials denied hatred as a motive and attributed the attack to "hooliganism."

The Perpetrators and Their Victims

16. (SBU) According to Aleksandr Brod of the Moscow Human Rights Bureau, radical and nationalist organizations are growing in Russia and there are approximately 70,000 skinheads throughout the country.

Disturbing to Brod is the fact that skinheads are appearing in small cities in addition to metropolitan areas such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. Skinheads tend to be young (15-20 years) and extremely nationalistic. Typically, they have acted in small groups that are not centrally organized and they communicate via the internet.

17. (SBU) In addition to skinhead groups, Brod told us about well-organized, national political movements such as the Movement against Illegal Immigration (Ref B), which is able to organize mass actions throughout the country. He accused the organization of sending its representatives to Russian regions in order to further inflame incidents like the one that led to inter-ethnic riots in Kondopoga, Republic of Karelia in September 2006.

18. (SBU) The lack of organization among skinheads may be changing. In St. Petersburg, a recent series of attacks over the course of a few days showed some level of coordination. The police investigation following the attacks led to the discovery of an apartment from which the attacks may have been planned and coordinated.

19. (SBU) According to Gang Li, UNHCR's Senior Protection Officer in Moscow, the ethnic groups at greatest risk of ethnic violence in Russia are North Koreans, Chinese and Uzbeks. He noted that not only

are they at risk of xenophobic violence, but they are at risk of being forcibly returned to their country of origin by authorities.

¶10. (SBU) Reverend Robert Bronkema of the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy, whose parishioners include many African diplomats, students and refugees, told us that many live in fear. They do everything they can to avoid altercations including avoiding stadium areas and not venturing out on holidays, days when there are high profile soccer matches, or Hitler's birthday. The Chaplaincy runs a parish center in Moscow, which Rev. Bronkema described as "a place where people of color can come and feel safe."

¶11. (U) In a survey conducted by sociologists of the Public Opinion Foundation every fourth respondent expressed dislike of certain ethnic groups. The sociologists warned that the results of the survey indicate a "dangerously high" level of bigotry in the country.

Root Causes

¶12. (U) Some attribute the causes of xenophobia to social and economic problems in the country. The large and growing gap between rich and poor, the lack of youth policy and limited opportunities for some workers may be the reason why young people in particular are attracted to nationalist groups. Others say economic factors are just an excuse and that violence against ethnic minorities is purely based on hatred. Others point to recent history such as the independence movement in Chechnya and terrorist attacks such as the Moscow apartment building bombings in 1999, the storming of the Dubrovka Theater in 2002 and the Beslan school tragedy in 2004, as events that crystallized xenophobic thinking and provided excuses for public expressions of racist sentiments.

¶13. (U) The upsurge in Russian patriotism in recent years may also be feeding xenophobia. As leaders promote Russian greatness, some take this a step further to espouse the cause of "Russia for Russians." Well-known Russian writer Lev Rubinshteyn in his recent book equated patriotism with xenophobia. Commenting on national behavior he writes: "patriots and xenophobes, are one and the same."

Mixed Messages from the Government

¶14. (U) The government has acknowledged that the problem of xenophobia exists and is growing. Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin, in his report on human rights issued in 2007, stated that nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments continued growing during ¶2006. "Cases of racial, ethnic, and religious hatred resulting in violence and mass clashes became more frequent. Victims of hate crimes are people of various nationalities - Russian citizens, and people with non-Slavic appearance in particular, as well as people from the near and far abroad. Hate crimes are becoming more and more

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brutal and cynical and the circles of people involved are widening," the report stated. Valeriy Tishkov an anthropologist and member of the Public Chamber acknowledged "an increase in ultranationalist sentiments" but noted 2007 was "relatively calm." As proof, he cited the State Duma campaign in which "the nationalist card was not played as compared with the previous campaign." He also suggested that the increase in extremist crimes may reflect improved performance by law enforcement in detecting these crimes. Despite official acknowledgment of the problem, Brod told us that after xenophobic incidents occur, federal and local officials make statements then "nothing is done" to address the underlying causes.

¶15. (SBU) The government has sent mixed signals. In January 2007, under the guise of controlling migration, a limit was imposed on the percentage of migrants permitted to work in markets (Ref B). The new limit disproportionately affected Azeri vendors of fruits and vegetables. In April 2007, this restriction was further expanded to forbid migrants from selling goods in markets (they are permitted to own market stalls and work there but they cannot make retail sales.)

The restrictions were an internal political move that fanned xenophobic sentiments. Putin, for his part, made comments about the need to "'Russify' the markets." In the fall of 2006, the government created hysteria against Georgians living in Russia following Georgia's accusation that several Russian diplomats serving in Tblisi were spies. Many Georgians were deported, Georgian restaurants were closed, students with Georgian last names were forced to leave schools and Russia stopped importing Georgian wine and mineral water.

¶16. (SBU) Attempts at the national level to respond to xenophobia have been limited to non-existent. Brod told us a federal tolerance program was shut down in 2005 and has not been replaced. A tolerance program in Moscow featuring billboard messages is underway and "well-funded," according to Brod. Some in the NGO community criticize the 250 million ruble campaign as ineffective. Galina Kozhevnikova of Sova Center told us NGOs that know about these issues were not consulted and that most of the money has ended up in the hands of various ethnic groups instead of being used to promote tolerance and aid those who have been victims of xenophobia. In St. Petersburg, Governor Matviyenko launched a tolerance program in 2006 which was intended to focus on education and improving inter-ethnic and inter-faith dialogue. Although a step in the right direction, the program has received mixed reviews for lack of funds, focus and results.

¶17. (SBU) Brod, who was recently appointed to the Public Chamber by Putin, told us he would like to use the institution to initiate a tolerance campaign. He is optimistic about his future plans despite the fact that reports and recommendations generated by the Public Chamber in the past largely have collected dust. His main goal is to initiate a new federal tolerance program aimed at involving authorities more actively in anti-hate crime initiatives and training.

¶18. (SBU) In the recent Duma campaign, there was no clear effort to appeal to nationalist sentiments and the government, in general, has been at pains to distance itself from xenophobic acts or campaigns. Moscow Mayor Luzhkov strongly condemned attacks that took place one evening near the Kremlin in June 2007, by ultranationalists of the Movement against Illegal Immigration against people from the Caucasus and Central Asia. One ethnic Armenian woman was hospitalized with stab wounds and 42 people were detained in the incident. Luzhkov said: "Any display of chauvinism, xenophobia or nationalism will be harshly put down in our capital." The annual nationalist "Russian March" in March, 2007 (Ref C) fell flat when Moscow city authorities went to great lengths to prevent the march, which had far fewer participants than organizers expected, from ballooning out of control. Other such marches including a "Unity Day" march in Vladivostok in 2006 also fell short of expectations (Ref D). In 2007, Russia's mainstream nationalist party "Rodina" was compelled, under Kremlin pressure, to merge with two other non-nationalist parties and its charismatic political leader, Dmitriy Rogozin, was appointed Ambassador to NATO, a move many attributed to the GOR's desire to dampen a nationalist vote.

¶19. (SBU) At the local level, there is more evidence of willingness on the part of authorities to deal with intolerance. In Yekaterinburg, a major destination for migrants from Central Asia (Reftel E), local officials are developing hostels to house migrants while they apply for work permits and undergo health examinations. In addition, the regional government established a labor migration center to assist migrants with work permits and housing. Trainings for employers have also been conducted so they understand the law on migration.

¶20. (SBU) In Karelia, one year after the ethnically fueled riots in Kondopoga, local officials and Muslim leaders say things have improved quite a bit (Ref F.) Authorities have tried to generate dialogue among various ethnic and religious groups and the prosecution of those involved on both sides in the riots has

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proceeded relatively fairly.

Prosecutors Opt for Easy Conviction

¶21. (SBU) The prosecution of hate crimes is a mixed bag. From the prospective of prosecutors, they face the same problems with hate crime cases as they do with organized crime cases: weak witness protection and no mechanism for getting cooperating defendant testimony. Also, some prosecutors are unskilled at presenting cases in court. Hate crime cases require proof of motive which can be difficult to prove when other factors such as robbery or drunkenness are also involved. The result is that it is easier to prosecute crimes involving hooliganism, which does not require proof of motive.

¶22. (SBU) The Sova Center reported that prosecution of racist violence in 2007 slowed down. The center reported that there were at least 19 court decisions "in connection with racist and neo-nazi violence," including nine convictions for murder or heavy bodily harm which resulted in death. The Center noted a "change in attitude" of the Moscow Prosecutor's Office which they said is less concerned with high profile crimes. They do credit the Moscow Prosecutor's Office, however, with recognizing neo-Nazi violence. Kozhevnikova told us local authorities also have been doing more to remove racist propaganda such as leaflets and graffiti under the law on extremism. She noted a downside in the misuse of this same law against the political opposition and human rights activists.

¶23. (U) The Embassy's Law Enforcement Section provides extensive technical assistance to Russian law enforcement and legislators designed to improve Russia's ability to investigate and prosecute violent criminal activity, including hate crimes. Prosecutors in St. Petersburg credited Embassy training for convictions they obtained in cases involving the skinhead murders of an African student and a local anti-fascist activist (Reftel G). In addition, Embassy LES has worked closely with the Presidential Administration and Duma to draft cooperating witness legislation, which will make it easier for prosecutors to obtain and use the testimony of cooperating defendants in court. According to law enforcement sources, the current absence of such legislation seriously inhibits the prosecution of hate crimes (Reftel H).

¶24. (U) USAID has supported small programs in Ryazan, Kazan, Nizhniy Novgorod, Stavropol and Rostov-on-Don designed to create a climate of mutual trust between law enforcement and the community and to counteract intolerance and extremism. Local Tolerance Councils in each city, comprised of religious and community leaders and members of the law enforcement community, help to educate the police about tolerance and hate crimes and to improve inter-ethnic and inter-religious understanding. USAID also supports the Moscow Helsinki Group's new program to more closely monitor anti-Semitism and teach young people about discrimination and tolerance in selected regions.

COMMENT

¶25. (SBU) It is difficult to know the true extent of the problem of xenophobia in Russia. Statistics are of limited use because of their lack of reliability which is acknowledged by governmental and non-governmental sources alike. Changing attitudes will require a long-term solution but in the short term, Russia would do well to get a handle on the recording of hate crimes by training law enforcement to recognize and report accurately on hate crimes and to pass legislation to provide additional legal tools for the prosecution of these crimes. Until then, the small number of NGOs that focus on tolerance issues will fight an uphill battle in a climate where a resurgent Russia promotes messages of Russian greatness and does little to protect those who are vulnerable.